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INDIVIDUAL LEARNING PACKET/TEACHING UNIT

Death of a Salesman

ARTHUR MILLER



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Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Death of a Salesman

by Arthur Miller

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Death of a Salesman

ESSAY OR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Cite actions or patterns of behavior by Happy, first as a teenager and later as an adult, that would prove the thesis: "Happy is the neglected son, who is not taken seriously by his parents." He repeatedly tries to gain his parents' attention, but usually fails in doing so.
2. How do Willy's repeated references about being "boxed in" serve as a metaphor for his own life?
3. Identify the instances and cite the circumstances in which theft appears in this play; then state your opinion as to why Miller makes it so prominent.
4. Prove the thesis, by citing supporting comments or instances from the play, that the Lomans distort the past and then base their high expectations on this misinterpretation.
5. What is there about this play's set design, music, lighting, and staging that makes it expressionistic?
6. What elements of plot, dialogue, characterization, and theme make this a realistic play?
7. In what sense is Willy Loman a tragic hero?
8. Why do some critics say that *Death of a Salesman* is a portrait of the American Dream gone sour?
9. For each of the following, write a character study of at least one-half page per character in which you identify the important comments or actions of each. State why they spoke or acted the way they did: Willy, Biff, Happy, Linda, Charley, and Ben.

10. Discuss Willy's relationship with his father, and then the subsequent relationship with Willy's own sons. Contrast this latter relationship with Charley and Bernard's relationship.
11. By citing references to the play, prove that the following are themes in this play:
 - A. The confinement of the city versus the freedom of the country.
 - B. To be what you are brings happiness; to be what you think you should be, but may not have the temperament or talent for, brings unhappiness.
 - C. Willy Loman is the personification of the American Dream gone awry.
12. Critics generally consider this play not only Miller's masterpiece, but also one of the most important plays in the American theater. Although first produced in 1949, it has had many revivals, and it seems to have a universal appeal that transcends time and place (that is, that its intellectual appeal and emotional force are as strong and as relevant in Stockholm, Sweden, in 2000, as they were in Brooklyn, New York, in 1949). By referring to the characters, their motivations, problems, conflicts, and attempts at resolving the difficulties, indicate what the universal appeal of this play is.

Death of a Salesman

LECTURE

THE AMERICAN DREAM

Throughout the history of this country, America has been viewed as the “Land of Opportunity.” It is for this reason that millions of immigrants have come to this country seeking a better life for themselves and their children.

This dream of improving one’s station in life is as old as the country itself. To see this, we need look no further than Ben Franklin. Perhaps better than any other American, Franklin successfully typified the American Dream. Born into a working class family, he strove to improve his character, his mind and his talents. Through careful planning and hard work, he amassed wealth and rose economically, socially, and politically in his world.

As our Western frontier expanded, the dream grew. With the words, which are usually attributed to Horace Greeley, “Go west, young man,” in their minds, young Americans seeking their fortunes sought to expand the boundaries of their lives. It was not only in the West that fortunes were made, however, for ambitious young men like Carnegie and Mellon knew no geographical boundaries.

In literature, “the rags to riches” story of the successful young man who is honest, thrifty, and hard working became immortalized in the works of Horatio Alger. Thus for many, to some extent, the dream did come true. Not everyone became as successful as a Carnegie or Mellon, but in a more modest, but very real way, people and families did move up the socio-economic ladder. The capitalistic system, with all its faults, does allow anyone to rise from the poorest slums to become a success.

For some people though, like the Youngers in *A Raisin in the Sun*, the dream is long deferred; for some, like Gatsby, the dream turns to ashes; and for others, like the Lomans, the dream turns bitter and sour.

Note: All page references come from the Penguin Books edition of *Death of a Salesman*, copyright 1949.

Death of a Salesman

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Willy Loman (economically, socially, and when we meet him, emotionally a “low man”) - A hard working salesman who, at the end of his career, is physically exhausted.

Linda - The loving wife and mother who, wisely or not, has always deferred to her husband.

Biff - The older son who was an all state football hero in high school. As a teenager, he was handsome and popular, but he is now having trouble getting his life in order.

Happy - The younger son who is a materialistic, pleasure seeker. He is generally happy-go-lucky, but every once in a great while he questions the direction of his life.

Charley - He is a brash, down-to-earth, honest businessman who successfully runs his own business.

Bernard - Charley’s son, and a friend of Biff and Happy. Because Bernard is bright, studious, and not too athletic, the Lomans tease him.

Ben - Willy’s dead brother. He occurs as an apparition from Willy’s past.

Howard - Willy’s boss. He is somewhat selfish and callous with his employees.

Death of a Salesman

Objectives for the Student

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify and discuss the following themes in this play:
 - A. The city as a place of confinement and restriction versus nature, the country, as a place of openness and growth. Note the following motifs:
 1. Recurring use of the flute, a musical instrument associated with the woods;
 2. Repeated references to being boxed in by apartments, etc.;
 3. Repeated references to wilderness, open spaces, etc.;
 4. Repeated references to seeds and planting.
 - B. Who we are in terms of our real talents and ambitions. Note this conflict within Biff and repeated references to “who we are,” “who you are,” etc.
 - C. The American Dream. What is it for Willy, and how does he hope to achieve it? What goes wrong?
 - D. The corrosive effect of lying and dishonesty. Note:
 1. The role of theft and stealing
 2. The many times the Lomans, particularly Willy and Happy, exaggerate or distort the past.
 - E. The tragic hero as a man obsessed by his dream. Consider Miller’s comment in the 1966 Paris Review. “I’ve always been aware of that kind of agony, of someone who has some driving, implacable wish in him which never goes away, which he can never block out. And it broods over him, it makes him happy sometimes or it makes him suicidal, but it never leaves him. Any hero whom we even begin to think of as tragic is obsessed, whether it’s Lear or Hamlet or the women in the Greek plays.”
 - F. Relationships between fathers and sons. Consider the relationships between Willy and his father; between Willy and his sons; between Charley and Bernard.
2. identify and discuss those techniques of staging that lead critics to label this play as “expressionistic.” (Note the stage directions for the set, lighting, use of music, appearance of the characters at different ages, and the appearance of some characters who are dead.)

3. discuss in what manner, and to what extent, this is and is not a realistic play. Elements of plot, dialogue, characterization, and theme should be considered.
4. write a well-supported essay on the topic, "Death of a Salesman: An American Dream Gone Sour."
5. present both pro and con viewpoints on the issue of whether Willy Loman is a tragic hero.
6. write an accurate and well-supported character study for each of the characters in the play. In this regard, particularly note:
 - A. The motif of the neglected son which recurs in this play, and the irony in the fact that Happy shares Willy's dream.
 - B. The conflict within Biff.
 - C. Comparisons and contrasts for Willy, Charley, and Ben.
 - D. Charley and Bernard, two people who do know who they are.
 - E. Linda
7. identify and comment on those elements in this drama that make it a strong intellectual and moving emotional experience for most viewers.
8. Identify and discuss those features of this play that give the play its universality. ("Universality" means that the appeal of the play transcends the time and place for which it was written and has something to say to all people, regardless of where they live or in what period they are living.)

Death of a Salesman

TEST

I. Multiple Choice

- _____ 1. What is Willy's sales territory?
- A. Brooklyn
 - B. Boston
 - C. Rhode Island
 - D. New Jersey
 - E. all of New England
- _____ 2. What is it about Biff that upsets Willy the most?
- A. He spends all of his time chasing girls.
 - B. He is always stealing things.
 - C. He makes fun of Willy.
 - D. He will not get a decent job and make something of him self.
 - E. He will not help his brother Happy.
- _____ 3. Linda says that Willy's basic problem is that he
- A. is exhausted and needs to rest.
 - B. loves his sons too much.
 - C. has the wrong set of values.
 - D. is too timid.
 - E. talks and jokes too much.
- _____ 4. Biff has returned home to
- A. see his uncle.
 - B. get a coaching job.
 - C. start a career.
 - D. forgive Willy.
 - E. please his mother.
- _____ 5. In Act I, Happy is unhappy because
- A. his brother is home.
 - B. his father ignores him.
 - C. he cannot afford the car he wants.
 - D. he feels he has nothing substantial or meaningful in his life.
 - E. the girl he likes will not go out with him.

- ____ 6. Willy becomes angry with Linda for mending her stockings because
- A. of his guilt feelings.
 - B. of her laziness.
 - C. he gets them for nothing.
 - D. she does not listen to him.
 - E. All of the above

II. Identify the character who speaks the following lines:

- ____ 7. "Charlie is not liked. He is liked, but not well liked."
- A. Willy
 - B. Biff
 - C. Happy
 - D. Linda
 - E. Howard
- ____ 8. "Just because he prints University of Virginia on his sneakers doesn't mean he will graduate."
- A. Happy
 - B. Willy
 - C. Ben
 - D. Howard
 - E. Bernard
- ____ 9. "There is the only man [Ben] I ever met who knew the answer."
- A. Willy
 - B. Howard
 - C. Linda
 - D. Charley
 - E. Biff
- ____ 10. "Next time, I'll bring a deck with five aces."
- A. Willy
 - B. Howard
 - C. Ben
 - D. Charley
 - E. Biff
- ____ 11. "When I was seventeen, I walked into the jungle. When I was 21, I walked out. And, by God, I was rich."
- A. Charley
 - B. Willy
 - C. Ben
 - D. Howard
 - E. Biff

- ____ 12. "We never told the truth for ten minutes in this house."
A. Charley
B. Happy
C. Bernard
D. Biff
E. Charley
- ____ 13. "Never fight fair with a stranger, boy. You'll never get out of the jungle that way."
A. Charley
B. Bernard
C. Ben
D. Willy
E. Biff
- ____ 14. "He [Willy] had all the wrong dreams. All, all wrong."
A. Ben
B. Happy
C. Charley
D. Biff
E. Linda
- ____ 15. "Nobody dast blame this man [Willy]. A salesman is got to dream, boy. It comes with the territory."
A. Howard
B. Happy
C. Charley
D. Biff
E. Bernard
- ____ 16. "But where are all the people he knew? Maybe they blame him?"
A. Biff
B. Linda
C. Happy
D. Bernard
E. Charley
- ____ 17. "I've often thought of how strange it was that I knew he'd given up his life. What happened in Boston, Willy?"
A. Howard
B. Bernard
C. Linda
D. Charley
E. Happy

- _____ 18. “He’s [Willy] got no character—Charley won’t do this. Not in his own house—spewing out that vomit from his mind.”
- A. Ben
 - B. Bernard
 - C. Linda
 - D. Biff
 - E. Happy
- _____ 19. “I’m gonna show you and everybody else that Willy Loman did not die in vain. He had a good dream. It’s the only dream you can have—to come out number one man.”
- A. Charley
 - B. Biff
 - C. Happy
 - D. Bernard
 - E. Linda
- _____ 20. “I’m gonna get married, Mom. I wanted to tell you.”
- A. Howard
 - B. Biff
 - C. Happy
 - D. Bernard
 - E. Linda

ESSAYS (Answer any two)

1. While many plays are relevant only for the time and place in which they are produced, *Death of a Salesman* has a universal appeal that transcends time and place. Identify those qualities in this play that give it its universality. Why is its impact as strong today as it was in its first production in 1949?
2. Some people say that Willy Loman is too pathetic a character to be a tragic hero. Taking the opposite side of this argument, prove that Willy Loman is indeed a tragic hero.
3. State how Willy's repeated references to being "boxed in" serve as a metaphor for his life. Be sure to mention how Willy uses the term and be sure to describe the specific ways that Willy is portrayed as being "boxed in."
4. Critics maintain that Willy's vision of the American Dream had turned sour because Willy had a distorted or false sense of values. In an essay, identify what Willy's dream was, what his values were, and why those values were false or, at least, unsuitable for him.

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Test Answer key

1. E	5. D	9. A	13. C	17.B
2. D	6. A	10. D	14. D	18.D
3. A	7. A	11. C	15. C	19.C
4. C	8. E	12. D	16. B	20.C

ESSAY ANSWERS

1. Many years after it was first produced, *Death of a Salesman* still intellectually and emotionally moves an audience, because what the play had to say then about people, their motivations, relationships, conflicts and attempts at resolution are as true and meaningful today as when the play first appeared. In addition, cultural traits and exact financial numbers aside, people still have the same hopes, fears, and problems no matter where they live.

Willy Loman's dream to make a better life for himself and his family is a dream we can all understand and all share. His dream is typically human and so are his rationalizations, evasions, and mistakes. While all of us, when younger, can see a bit of ourselves in Biff or Happy, the more astute of us can also imagine the time when we will also see a bit of ourselves in Willy.

It is this common humanity to which we all see and respond. Willy, Biff, and Happy are more than characters; they are real people for us and as we watch them dream, argue, strive, and bungle, we are moved by their humaneness.

2. Although neither a prince nor a king, Willy Loman is basically a decent man whose life is ruled by an obsession, a dream. The dream or obsession, Miller points out, is a hallmark of all tragic heroes. Willy, like the other tragic heroes, cannot pull back, and he cannot compromise. Rather, he must single-mindedly pursue his obsession, even if it ends in disaster or death.

Throughout his life Willy has pursued his dream, but as we follow him, we can note a growing awareness in Willy that the dream is slipping away. After being fired by Howard, Willy meets Happy and Biff in the restaurant and the crisis is intense. He tells the boys that the woods are burning and he needs good news to bring home, but there is no good news. He cannot, as Howard suggested, appeal to his boys for help because that would admit the dream is failing.

Linda says she does not understand the reason for his suicide, at this time, especially, since the house is paid off and their economic needs are minimal. She says, "He [Willy] only needed a little salary." Charley responds, "No man needs only a little salary."

For Willy, this statement is especially true. He wanted, and needed, status, respect, financial success, and position for himself or, at least, for his boys. True to his dream, he cashed in on his twenty thousand dollar insurance, so that Biff can fulfill the dream that Willy had.

3. Repeatedly Willy refers to the apartment buildings being built in the neighborhood that are boxing in his own small home and blocking out the sunlight and air. The reader, however, can see that Willy is being boxed in himself, and the "boxed in" phrase may serve as a metaphor for Willy's own life.

All his adult life he has been a road salesman who has devoted his life to earning a living for his family by building the company's position in his territory. But now he has trouble driving, and apparently his sales have fallen off because he has been put on straight commission with no salary. At sixty-three, physically and emotionally exhausted, he is fired. His appeal to Howard, in which he says a man is not an orange that can be peeled and thrown away, falls on deaf ears.

Charlie offers Willy a job at \$50 per week and no traveling, but Willy's false pride will not allow him to work for Charlie, whom Willy considers an inferior. It is not only circumstances, but also Willy's distorted values, that box him in.

Finally, the family for which Willy worked and dreamed appears to be disintegrating. Why, he asks, can it not be the family it was when the boys were younger. We watch, as Willy gradually becomes aware that the disintegration of the family has something to do with the time he cheated with the Woman in Boston. By the end of Act II, Willy realizes that there is only one way out of this box.

4. Willy dreamed of achieving status, respect, and financial success in the world of business. To reach that goal, Willy thought that one needed to have personality and to make a good appearance; to be well liked, as Dave Singleman was, insured success.

Charlie's problem, according to Willy, was that he was liked but not well-liked, and he certainly did not care about making a good appearance. The young Bernard, who was pale, studious, and earnest, would not, in Willy's mind, have much of a chance against someone with Biff's personality and glamour. For the young Biff, anything could be excused because of his glamour. When Biff stole the football from the locker room, Willy says the coach will probably congratulate Biff for his initiative in "borrowing" the ball to practice. From this, one might conclude that honesty, education, and studying were not things on which Willy placed a high value. In the same regard, Willy did not place a value on manual labor. When Biff said something about being a carpenter, Willy responds that even Biff's grandfather was better than that.

That he looked down on men who worked with their hands was especially unfortunate since it appears that this is where his true talent lay. It was this snobbishness and his insistence on financial success in the business world as the only measure of success that kept him from understanding Biff. Worse yet, it was this attitude that Willy passed on to Biff and created the conflict in Biff between what he wanted to be and what he thought he should be.

Thus, if Willy had valued his own talents, and his dream had been in line with those talents, it would not have gone sour. Biff seems to have learned this lesson because he says he knows who he is and he seems prepared to act on that knowledge.

Death of a Salesman

STUDY GUIDE

Teacher's Copy

ACT I – pages 1-29

Since the essence of drama is characters in conflict with themselves or others, what do we learn of the four major characters in *Death of a Salesman* early in the play?

Willy

1. What is most noticeable about him?

He seems to be physically exhausted, and his mind wanders. He says one thing and then will contradict himself a few sentences later.

2. Why does his mind keep slipping back to the past?

Because of the physical exhaustion and emotional turmoil of his present life, he desires a time in the past when life seemed happier, easier, more understandable, and had less complex rules.

3. What upsets him about his job?

Apparently, he cannot handle the long drives anymore, nor is he making the number of sales he had made in the past.

4. What is it about Biff that upsets him?

Biff is thirty-four years old, and he has not yet settled into a career. It has been ten years since the end of W.W. II, and Biff has yet to have a job in which he made even thirty-five dollars a week.

Linda

1. How does she feel about Willy?

She is still very much in love with Willy, and she defers to him.

2. Describe her as you see her.

Answers will vary, but should include the point that Linda loves Willy and tries to please him.

Biff

1. What is troubling Biff?

He feels that he should be building his future instead of wasting time, but he does not know what his future should be. He has tried various jobs, but none of them has satisfied him.

2. Why has he returned home?

He has returned home to settle down and to begin making something of his life.

3. How does he say a man should spend his life?

A man should work outdoors and enjoy life, not work in an office or store fifty weeks a year, longing for a two-week vacation.

4. How does Biff feel about Willy?

He seems to resent Willy, but at this point, it is not clear why.

Happy

1. What is his position in life, and how does he feel about it?

He works in a department store. He answers Biff's questions as to whether he is happy or content with "Hell, no!" Hap suspects that, like his boss, he (Happy), too, will never be able to be content in a new house. At times like this, he seems to suspect that one needs more than materialistic success in order to be pleased with life, but he never gets beyond that inkling

2. What were the things he always wanted in life, and how does he feel now that he has them?

He desired an apartment, a car, and plenty of women, and he has them now, but he is still lonely.

3. Describe his attitude toward Biff.

He seems to admire and look up to Biff.

4. What is there about his father that has him concerned?

Lately, Willy has been talking to himself quite a bit.

Act I – pages 20-41

1. On page 20, what is the implication of the following exchange between the two sons?

HAPPY: You're not still sour on Dad, are you, Biff?

BIFF: He's all right, I guess.

At one time in the past, Biff must have had some problems with Willy.

2. On page 21, why does Biff believe that his Dad is mocking him?

When he talks to Biff, Willy always appears to have a mocking look on his face, or at least this is what Biff thinks.

3. On page 22, what is the conflict within Biff? What do you suppose might be the cause of this conflict?

He enjoys working outdoors on a ranch or as a farmhand, but he feels that he should aim for a job with more status like a store executive; however, but that would mean working at something he did not like.

4. What are Happy's problems?

Happy wants to be a boss so he can have power and respect, but he suspects even that will not fulfill him. Women do not ease his loneliness, and people around him are false.

In addition, he takes bribes from manufacturers, is a womanizer, and on occasion, he is troubled by this behavior, but he does not stop doing it.

5. Who is Bill Oliver and why does Happy say Oliver will help Biff? What is Biff's reservation about Oliver?

Biff worked for Oliver years ago and is thinking of trying to borrow seven, eight or even ten thousand dollars from Oliver to buy a ranch. Happy says, "I bet he'd back you. 'Cause he thought highly of you." Biff, though, wonders if Oliver still thinks that Biff was the one who stole a carton of basketballs. (Pg. 26)

6. Willy's mind is wandering. How does Happy react to this? How does Biff react? What is noticeably missing in both reactions?

Biff gets angry because he knows his mom can hear Willy talking, and assumes that it must upset her. Happy says that it is terrible, but then he adds, "It's getting embarrassing." Neither one seems to feel any great sympathy for Willy or what might be troubling him. (Pg. 27)

7. In the flashback scene, how old are the boys? What is the atmosphere? Who is Bernard, and how is he treated by the Lomans?

Biff is seventeen or eighteen and Happy is two years younger. It seems as though the family relationships are pleasant, friendly, and that few things are amiss. Willy looks toward his future, and the boys are proud of him. Bernard is a classmate of Biff's and a neighbor. The Lomans seem to like him, but they treat him like an inferior.

8. At this point, what opportunities and dangers are in front of Biff?

He has three college scholarship offers, but he is in danger of failing math.

9. In his conversations with the boys, Willy suggests that the people in his world treat him with great respect, but his conversation with Linda contradicts this. How do you account for this?

Willy, because he needs their love and respect, exaggerates to the family and particularly to the boys. He gets caught up in the exaggeration himself, but he sometimes sees the truth or the downside. Bills are mounting and Willy's sales are not increasing.

10. How does Willy excuse Biff's stealing of the football?

Willy says it shows that Biff has "initiative."

11. Why does Willy become so angry with Linda for mending her stockings?

He has just remembered an affair he had with a woman to whom he had given new stockings, so, apparently, Willy feels guilty about Linda having to mend stockings.

12. What four things does Willy place a high value on?

Willy admires financial success, personality, appearance, and the concept of being well liked

13. What one or two things does Willy appear to place little value on?

Education and a strict code of honesty do not seem to be important to him.

Act I – pages 41-52

1. What is Charley concerned about?

Charley is concerned that Willy's mind is wandering and the fact that Willy's job is not adequate to support him and his wife.

2. Who is Ben and what does Willy think of him? What does Ben represent for Linda?

Ben is Willy's dead brother. He is an older brother, and Willy appears to idolize him. For Linda, Ben represents a force that would pull Willy away from home and make him dissatisfied.

3. How does Willy feel about the boys stealing lumber?

He treats it as a prank rather than the moral and legal infraction that it is. In effect, Willy tells the boys that stealing is all right.

4. In what ways are Charley and Ben opposites?

Charley is a generous, considerate man who successfully operates his own business. Ben is as financially successful as Charley, but Ben is a ruthless, selfish entrepreneur.

5. What does Willy mean when he says that he feels, "kind of temporary about myself"? (Pg. 51)

While it is not exactly clear what he is feeling, it is clear that he is feeling emotionally troubled about himself and his life at this point.

6. What reference to the jungle that Willy used does Ben repeat?

Willy had said on page 41, "What's the mystery? The man knew what he wanted and went out and got it! Walked into a jungle, and comes out, the age of twenty-one, and he's rich!" Then, on page 52, Ben reiterates it to his younger brother by saying, "William, when I walked into the jungle, I was seventeen. When I walked out, I was twenty-one. And, by God, I was rich!"

Act I – pages 52-69

1. On page 68, Linda asks Willy, “Willy dear, what has he [Biff] got against you?” As you read this section, look for any indication that Biff has a grudge against Willy and make a guess as to what it may be about.

It appears that it could have something to do with a woman, Biff’s success or lack of success, or it may simply be due to Willy’s depression.

2. On pages 53-54, why is Linda angry and disappointed with Biff?

She feels that Willy is in a bad way emotionally, and Biff does nothing to help him.

3. What do we learn about Willy’s salary?

He is paid only commissions but no salary. Since a commission is a percentage of sales, falling sales result in little or no income for Willy.

4. What is significant about the auto accidents that Willy has had?

Linda tells the boys that the accidents were not accidents. Willy, she says, was trying to kill himself.

5. What would be the probable use for that piece of rubber hose that Linda found?

Presumably, Willy made it so that he might attach it to the gas heater and then inhale the gas.

6. Why does Linda say, “Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person”? (Pg. 56)

Because Willy is a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him, he must be given some help.

7. Why is Biff going to ask Bill Oliver to lend him \$10,000 or \$15,000? Do you think that Oliver will lend Biff the money? Give a reason.

Biff wants to borrow the money to buy a business. At one time, Biff worked for Bill Oliver and thought Oliver liked him. Simply on the basis of that, though, it does not seem likely that Oliver will lend him the money.

8. What causes the argument about Biff asking Oliver for a loan?

Willy wants Biff to follow the techniques that always worked for him, despite his (Willy’s) recent failings. Linda interrupts and resentment spills out. Willy, though, sums up his own sadness by saying, “Give my best to Bill Oliver—he may remember me.” (Pg. 65)

Act II – pages 71-87

1. At the beginning of Act II, there is a good deal of optimism. Why are Willy and Linda optimistic? Why do they need an advance on Willy's pay?

Willy is optimistic because he plans to ask Howard for an office job to get off the road. They are both happy because Biff is going to ask Oliver for a loan. Linda sums up their optimism when she says, "It's changing, Willy, I can feel it changing." (Pg. 74) They need an advance to pay the life insurance premium and their final mortgage payment.

2. The scene with Howard, Willy, and the tape recorder goes on for nearly two pages. What is the purpose of that scene?

Howard is the callous, insensitive businessman who spends money on toys, but he has so little compassion for a long-time employee in trouble that he barely gives Willy his attention.

3. At the outset, how much does Willy ask Howard for? By how much does he drop his request?

Willy asks for sixty-five dollars a week, but he then reduces his request to fifty per week and then to forty.

4. What did Dave Singleman represent for Willy?

Dave Singleman was Willy's role model because Dave was the epitome of the successful traveling salesman.

5. What is the picture we get of Howard? What is ironic about the way he addresses Willy?

Howard is the successful but callous businessman who cannot see beyond profit and loss. Even though Willy is old enough to have seen Howard carried around as a baby. Howard refers to him as "kid."

6. When Willy compares himself to an orange, how might his comments be interpreted as a criticism of the capitalistic system?

Willy says that he put thirty-four years into the company and now he does not even have enough money to pay his insurance. The company, he implies, has made a great deal of money from his labor, and now they should not simply peel away his skin and throw it away.

7. How does Howard resolve his problem with Willy?

Howard fires Willy and asks him to "pull yourself together" because "I need the office, Willy." (Pg. 84)

8. On pages 84-87, Ben appears again. Willy is torn between Ben and Linda. What might each represent?

Ben represents rugged individualism and adventure; Linda represents the home and family from which Ben would pull Willy away.

Act II – pages 88-99

1. On page 88, Willy says to Biff, “You realize what this [game] means?” What does the game mean to Willy?

To Willy, it means the gateway to fame and fortune for Biff.

2. How do we know that the championship game is just a game to Charley? Considering Charley’s situation, why would he think this way?

Charley makes jokes about it because he sees success in terms of hard work and planning, not of being good at games.

3. What question does Bernard ask that makes Willy angry and defensive?

Bernard asks, “What happened in Boston, Willy?” (Pg. 94)

4. Judging from what Bernard said, what took all the life out of Biff? What about Bernard must irk Willy?

Whatever happened in Boston between Biff and Willy caused a great deal of Problems for them. Willy feels his sons are failures, but Bernard, nearly Biff’s age and considered “anemic” by Willy, is a successful lawyer.

5. On page 98, Willy says, “Funny, y’know . . . you end up worth more dead than alive.” What does Willy mean and how does Charley respond?

For Willy, the life insurance policy he has is worth more than all his other assets. Charley responds, “...nobody’s worth nothing dead.”

Act II – pages 100 - 121

1. What is the purpose of the scene between Stanley and Happy and then between Happy and the girl?

It serves to further develop Happy's character as a somewhat irresponsible, pleasure-seeking skirt-chaser.

2. Biff enters. How did his meeting with Oliver go?

It was terrible. Biff realized that Oliver had no idea who he was, and even if he did, Oliver would never lend him money.

3. In this scene, more than anything else, Biff would like to sort out his life by facing the truth. How do Willy and Happy prevent him from doing this?

Willy desperately wants to hear good news, not bad news, so he keeps interrupting. Happy, knowing what his father wants, lies about the meeting.

4. In the middle of page 109, with appearance of young Bernard, Willy's mind begins to wander again. While Willy talks about the failed math, what is Biff trying to say?

Biff is trying to tell Willy that he is not the kind of person to whom Oliver is going to lend money.

5. On page 111, when the operator's voice says "Standish Arms [in Boston]" we see another of Willy's flashbacks. Willy is talking to the apparition of the operator. Why do the boys get upset? Why does Biff change his story about Oliver?

They are frightened because Willy appears to have lost touch with reality. His talk seems to make no sense at all. To calm Willy down, Biff starts telling him what he wants to hear.

6. A number of things become clear at the end of the scene: e.g., the insistent knocking at the door, Willy saying, "No, No!" to the operator, and the hotel page's voice. What happened in Boston?

Willy had had an affair with a woman in Boston, and Biff saw the woman in Willy's hotel room.

7. How has the relationship between Willy and Biff ended in this scene?

Willy tries to explain the Woman's presence with blatantly obvious lies. Biff calls Willy a liar, a fake, and leaves. Willy threatens to whip Biff, but ends up on the floor on his knees.

Act II – pages 122-136

1. As this scene opens, why is Linda so angry?

Linda is angry because the boys had walked out of the restaurant and left their father.

2. Happy says, “But, Mom, he had a great time with us.” Is this a bold-faced lie, or does Happy believe it?

Happy lies a great deal about many things and also deceives himself, so he may even have rationalized this. It is more likely, though, that Happy is simply lying.

3. In this scene what signals Willy’s complete breakdown?

He is planting seeds in the middle of the night.

4. What is the guaranteed, “gilt-edged” proposition to which Willy refers?

If he kills himself, his life insurance policy will pay \$20,000.

5. Willy believes that Biff has failed at everything just to spite him [Willy]. Biff responds that it is not that way anymore. What reason does Biff give for quitting every job he ever had?

Biff says that he “stole [him]self out of every good job since high school,” and he says that his father had filled him “so full of hot air” that he could not take orders from anyone. (Pg. 131)

6. On page 133, what action of Biff’s makes Willy believe that Biff does love him?

He breaks down and cries as he is holding Willy.

7. What action concludes Act II?

A car speeds away from the house.

Requiem – pages 137 - 139

1. On page 137, Linda says, “But where are all the people he knew? Maybe they blame him.” What does she mean?

Linda feels that Willy's business friends do not show up at the funeral because they blame him for killing himself.

2. CHARLEY: “Yeah. He was a happy man with a batch of cement.”
LINDA: “He was so wonderful with his hands.”
BIFF: “He had all the wrong dreams. All, all wrong.” (Pg. 138)
Comment on what Willy's dreams were and what dreams Biff thought Willy should have had.

Willy's dreams were of reaching financial success through the power of his salesman's personality. Biff, though, believed that Willy's talents were in his hands, and that his father did not know who he [Willy] really was.

3. When Linda says on page 139, “We're free and clear,” this statement could have a meaning beyond that which she intends. What does she mean and what else could it mean?

Linda means that the mortgage is paid off, but it could also mean that the family is free and clear of the past.

4. What does the ending of the play suggest is in store for Happy?

Happy is going to live his father's dream and presumably, he will make the same mistakes because he has the same distorted values.

5. Willy's attitude might be summed up in the cliché, “It's not what you know, but who you know” that makes you successful in business. How do you feel about that statement?

Student opinion will vary.

Death of a Salesman

STUDY GUIDE

Student Copy

ACT I – pages 1-29

Since the essence of drama is characters in conflict with themselves or others, what do we learn of the four major characters in *Death of a Salesman* early in the play?

Willy

1. What is most noticeable about him?
2. Why does his mind keep slipping back to the past?
3. What upsets him about his job?
4. What is it about Biff that upsets him?

Linda

1. How does she feel about Willy?
2. Describe her as you see her.

Biff

1. What is troubling Biff?
2. Why has he returned home?
3. How does he say a man should spend his life?
4. How does Biff feel about Willy?

Happy

1. What is his position in life, and how does he feel about it?
2. What were the things he always wanted in life, and how does he feel now that he has them?
3. Describe his attitude toward Biff.
4. What is there about his father that has him concerned?

Act I – pages 20-41

1. On page 20, what is the implication of the following exchange between the two sons?
HAPPY: You're not still sour on Dad, are you, Biff?
BIFF: He's all right, I guess.
2. On page 21, why does Biff believe that his Dad is mocking him?
3. On page 22, what is the conflict within Biff? What do you suppose might be the cause of this conflict?
4. What are Happy's problems?
5. Who is Bill Oliver and why does Happy say Oliver will help Biff? What is Biff's reservation about Oliver?
6. Willy's mind is wandering. How does Happy react to this? How does Biff react? What is noticeably missing in both reactions?
7. In the flashback scene, how old are the boys? What is the atmosphere? Who is Bernard, and how is he treated by the Lomans?

8. At this point, what opportunities and dangers are in front of Biff?
9. In his conversations with the boys, Willy suggests that the people in his world treat him with great respect, but his conversation with Linda contradicts this. How do you account for this?
10. How does Willy excuse Biff's stealing of the football?
11. Why does Willy become so angry with Linda for mending her stockings?
12. What four things does Willy place a high value on?
13. What one or two things does Willy appear to place little value on?

Act I – pages 41-52

1. What is Charley concerned about?
2. Who is Ben and what does Willy think of him? What does Ben represent for Linda?
3. How does Willy feel about the boys stealing lumber?
4. In what ways are Charley and Ben opposites?
5. What does Willy mean when he says that he feels, “kind of temporary about myself”?
(Pg. 51)
6. What reference to the jungle that Willy used does Ben repeat?

Act I – pages 52-69

1. On page 68, Linda asks Willy, “Willy dear, what has he [Biff] got against you?” As you read this section, look for any indication that Biff has a grudge against Willy and make a guess as to what it may be about.
2. On pages 53-54, why is Linda angry and disappointed with Biff?
3. What do we learn about Willy’s salary?
4. What is significant about the auto accidents that Willy has had?
5. What would be the probable use for that piece of rubber hose that Linda found?
6. Why does Linda say, “Attention, attention must finally be paid to such a person”? (Pg. 56)
7. Why is Biff going to ask Bill Oliver to lend him \$10,000 or \$15,000? Do you think that Oliver will lend Biff the money? Give a reason.
8. What causes the argument about Biff asking Oliver for a loan?

Act II – pages 71-87

1. At the beginning of Act II, there is a good deal of optimism. Why are Willy and Linda optimistic? Why do they need an advance on Willy's pay?
2. The scene with Howard, Willy, and the tape recorder goes on for nearly two pages. What is the purpose of that scene?
3. At the outset, how much does Willy ask Howard for? By how much does he drop his request?
4. What did Dave Singleman represent for Willy?
5. What is the picture we get of Howard? What is ironic about the way he addresses Willy?
6. When Willy compares himself to an orange, how might his comments be interpreted as a criticism of the capitalistic system?
7. How does Howard resolve his problem with Willy?
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7. How has the relationship between Willy and Biff ended in this scene?

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3. In this scene what signals Willy’s complete breakdown?
4. What is the guaranteed, “gilt-edged” proposition to which Willy refers?
5. Willy believes that Biff has failed at everything just to spite him [Willy]. Biff responds that it is not that way anymore. What reason does Biff give for quitting every job he ever had?
6. On page 133, what action of Biff’s makes Willy believe that Biff does love him?
7. What action concludes Act II?

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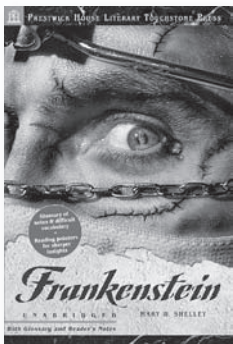
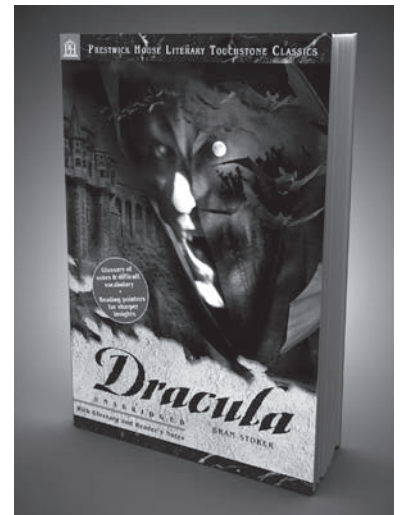
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